

Georgia Department of Natural Resources

Environmental Protection Division

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Georgia EPD Announces Next Phases of Coastal Groundwater Management

The Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) has announced it will require further reductions in groundwater withdrawals in part of the state's coastal region to address problems with saltwater seeping into the freshwater aquifer.

The requirements apply to EPD-permitted municipal and industrial groundwater systems in the so-called red zone, which includes Chatham County and that portion of Effingham County south of GA Hwy 119, and in the yellow zone, which consists of Bryan and Liberty counties.

"This agreement is the result of a cooperative effort between EPD and the groundwater withdrawal permit holders in the region," said EPD Director Jud Turner. "Everyone has worked hard over the past year to determine the next set of goals for managing coastal groundwater resources."

The red zone reductions will be done in two phases. Using 2012 as a baseline, the new requirements call for a reduction of permitted water withdrawals in the red zone from approximately 60 million gallons per day (mgd) to about 50 mgd by 2020 and to 45 mgd by 2025. The goal in the less populated yellow zone is to reduce 2012 permitted withdrawals by 1.0 mgd by 2020.

EPD began work in the late 1990s to better understand saltwater intrusion and its effect on the Floridan aquifer, which supplies fresh groundwater to the coastal region. Scientific research has shown that increased demand over many decades caused groundwater levels to drop and the movement of a saltwater plume toward Savannah.

"Water withdrawal reductions taken over the years have slowed the movement of the saltwater plume, but it's clear further action is needed," said EPD Director Turner. "We don't expect to stop the plume with these latest actions, but we can continue to manage it by achieving these new goals."

In addition, the state of Georgia is conducting a deep well demonstration project on Tybee Island to determine if a deeper well can provide an alternative source of good quality water.

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